

'If America was a football team ...'

Andrew Waters is a sophomore at West Lauderdale High School. He enjoys hunting and fishing, and wants to be a game warden. This is his letter to the troops.

Dear American troops,

I come from a small state and I live in a place called Lauderdale County. Nothing new ever really happens and that's the way I like it.

All my life I have been brought up in the country, so I could never imagine what it would be like living in a country like Iraq — but I am thankful that we have troops like you that choose to fight for the freedoms that we all hold so dear.

In my school, we have been learning a

lot about the war in Iraq. Every since the war started, I have really come to appreciate all our freedoms and the people who defend them.

So from the bottom of my heart, thank you. I know to you it just seems like you're doing your job, but to a lot of people it means so much. To me, America is the greatest nation in the world and America would not be anything without troops devoted to defending her.

It is the love of the people, the heart of the nation and the strength of our troops that keep this nation rich and beautiful. I am so thankful that God chose to give me the blessing of being born in the United States and I pray, and will keep praying, for

every troop that fights for our freedoms.

I can't even think of the words to express how I feel — the only thing I can say is thank you. I am thinking about joining the military when I get out of school.

A lot of people try to start controversy over the war in Iraq, but I think we are in the right. Everyone deserves to be free, and America is just the nation to give it to them — and we will.

In a football game, normally the team that wants it the most wins and, if America was a football team, we would be the best ... Everyone here at West Lauderdale and in little ol' Mississippi thanks you.

Andrew Waters

The Lost Ribbon

Like hundreds of drivers in east Mississippi, Angie Hicks displays a magnetic yellow ribbon on her car to support U.S. troops in harm's way. But Angie, a student at Meridian Community College, came into possession of that ribbon in an uncommon way.

By Angie Hicks

special to The Star

Walking through the parking lot after watching a high school football game, I came upon a yellow magnetic ribbon on the ground, obviously lost from a car.

I had noticed around town a majority of cars displayed a ribbon, sometimes more than one, yet I never exactly knew their purpose. You see, the print was too small to read from a few car lengths back (after rear-ending a truck a few months ago, I follow cars from a farther distance now).

As I picked up the dirty magnet, I came to realize it was a "Support Our Troops" ribbon! Just seeing this made thoughts of a man I had met recently stream into my head. I stood there like a statue thinking of how he had been called to active duty and would be leaving for Iraq in January.

I had traveled to Camp Shelby in Hattiesburg a few times to see him, and he had come back to Meridian to visit his family and me. Knowing he was leaving soon, I tried to keep an emotional distance from him, but things work in weird ways.

I realized this about the same time that I realized I was still standing motionless in



PHOTO BY PAULA MERRITT / THE MERIDIAN STAR

A NEW HOME

Angie Hicks gives a lost ribbon a new home by displaying it on her car. Hicks found the ribbon on the ground in a parking lot and cleaned it up to show her support for U.S. troops.

a parking lot. I started walking toward my car, thinking about all the stories I'd heard of children being killed and men not returning from war.

At that point, when I made it to my car, I realized exactly what these ribbons stand for. As I opened my car door, I slapped

that magnet on the side of my car with pride, and it has remained there ever since.

No ribbon should be a lost ribbon, and now, that once-filthy magnet that was lying in the mud is lost no more! Instead, I display it just as other cars do around town.

Now I don't just see pride — I feel it.



ILLUSTRATION BY JACQURIS SPENCER

MESSAGE FOR THE TROOPS

Jacquris Spencer is a third-grade student at Northeast Elementary School. He is the son of Suzie Davis. He drew this picture in Mandy Goldman's art class. It's not clear whether the flames in Jacquris' picture are meant to show how hot it is in Iraq — or to suggest a final destination for tyrants and al-Qaeda terrorists. Here is his message to the troops fighting overseas: "America is soldiers fighting to keep us from suffering and fighting to keep us safe. Thank you for being brave."



WHY DO YOU DISPLAY A YELLOW RIBBON?

Doug Clayton, 19, sits on his hood of his car — showing off two of the nine yellow ribbons he displays. Clayton, an employee of Winn-Dixie on Highway 39 North, said the ribbons are in honor of his friends, LaToya Pringle and Willie Mosley, who are members of the Mississippi National Guard. "I just want to support them," he said. "I hope they come back safe."

PHOTO BY PENNY RANDALL / THE MERIDIAN STAR

Key Field

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of the Mississippi Air National Guard is also a tenant unit at Key Field.

The wartime mission of the Air Traffic Control Squadron is to deploy, operate and maintain air traffic control and landing systems in either a stand-alone capacity or in conjunction with base communications packages in support of major command requirements.

The 248th's gaining command is the Air Combat Command, another major command of the U.S. Air Force.

The 248th is one of 10 ATC squadrons in the Air Guard. The squadron also provides all of the civilian and military air traffic control for Key Field.

Salute

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and, at the same time, it made me so proud of both the man walking behind me and the young men standing in front of me. I smiled at the young men and continued walking a bit ahead of my parents into the stadium.

I learned something that night. I learned that no matter how old and out-of-shape a serviceman gets, he is still worthy of recognition and salute, and while the world might forget what he did years ago in a battlefield in Vietnam, his compatriots in the service today won't forget.

Those young soldiers recognized a sacrifice

he made, and he, in turn, recognized a sacrifice they make today.

I realized that my dad was truly a hero, as were the young men who saluted him. The military teaches dedication, not only to a job, but also to each other. I witnessed that dedication that night outside the Northeast stadium — and it's a memory I will always cherish.

It's a cherished memory because it's made me more aware of what our men and women, battling things I can't begin to imagine, do for us each and every day.

Just like I won't take lightly my dad's contribution to my freedom today, never again will I not notice the servicemen standing nearby.